CHRISTIANITY

Distinct from the

Religion of *Nature*,

In Answer

To a late Book, Entitled,

Christianity as Old as the Creation, &c.

Part. I.

Being an Examination of the Author's *General Hypotheſis*, that *Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only in the manner of their being communicated.*

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PREFACE.

THE *Ingenious Author, whoſe elaborate Performance I have undertaken to examine, pretends to have diſcover'd the true and only* Secret *of* Reconciling Natural and Reveal'd Religion: *A Secret truly* Such *hitherto; and for which the Chriſtian World is ſolely indebted to the happy Genius and Penetration of this Author. Indeed, when we conſider how natural and eaſy an* Hypotheſis *this Gentleman has luckily hit upon, it may ſeem a little Strange, that it ſhou'd ſo long have eſcap'd the ſagacity and diligence of the learnedeſt Chriſtian Writers. But the Glory of it was due by Fate to the* Preſent Age, *and the particular Honour of the Diſcovery reſerv'd for the Ingenious Author of* Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation, *&c.*

Had the Learned Apologiſts *for the* Chriſtian Religion *been acquainted with this* modern Hypotheſis, *what an infinite deal of Trouble wou'd it have ſav'd them? How ſuperfluous now appear all their Labours; how unneceſſary the Pains they took in vindicating the* particular *Doctrines and Precepts of this Religion, by ſhewing their conformity and agreement with the unprejudic'd Dictates of Right Reaſon? Had they dreamt of our Author's* Scheme, *they might have thrown by their Pens, and only reply'd to their Adverſaries, that* Chriſtianity *was but* Another Name for the Religion of Nature, *and the buſineſs had been done; nor need they have Spent their time, and their oil, in proving the* Sun *to be* as bright as the Sun, *or* Snow as white as Snow. *But they were fooliſhly taught to think there was ſomething* more *in the* Religion of Jeſus, *than in* That *of* Meer Nature.

Notwithſtanding the many excellent Apologies *for the* Reaſonableneſs *of* Chriſtianity, *This Gentleman is confident, that the receiv'd Notions concerning it tend to deſtroy that* Harmony, *which ought to ſubſiſt between* It, *and the* Religion of Nature; *and therefore, prompted by Zeal for the Honour of Religion, and griev'd, that two ſuch good Friends ſhou'd differ,*

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he kindly interpoſes for their mutual Reconciliation. *But*

— Aliquis latet Error, Equo ne credite Teucri.

There have been many Attempts of late to deſtroy the Credit of the Chriſtian Revelation. *To effect this, the Authors have generally levell'd their Arguments againſt the* Evidence *of it : A Method of Attack, which requires the* Infidel *to be a Man of great Reading, and well vers'd in* Antiquity. *If the Attack be made on the* Prophecies *of the* Old Teſtament, *ſaid to be accompliſh'd in the perſon of* Chriſt ; *the Author muſt be equipp'd with a large ſhare of* Hiſtorical *and* Critical Learning. *To overthrow the Credit of our Saviour's* Miracles, *he muſt miſapply the* Allegorical Interpretations *of the* Fathers ; *and conſequently muſt have read 'em. Our Author's Oppoſition is carry'd on at a much eaſier rate, and at little or no expence of Learning. It cuts the Controverſy between the Patrons of* Chriſtianity *and* Deiſm *extreamly ſhort. To what purpoſe ſhou'd you diſpute whether the* Chriſtian Religion *be a* true *Religion, if it be an* Uſeleſs *one? Admit but its* Inſignificancy ; *and any controverſy about the* Authority

thority *of the* Evangelical Writings *is of leſs importance, if poſſible, than the famous one between a* great Critick, *and a* great Wit, *about the* Genuineneſs *of* Phalaris's Epiſtles.

If this Author's Scheme *be juſtly founded, what becomes of the boaſted* Advantages *of* Chriſtianity *above the* Religion of Nature? *In vain may ſhe plead, that ſhe has inſtructed us in the* True Worſhip *of the* Supream Being, *from which Mankind (even the* Politeſt Nations) *had univerſally departed: that ſhe has brought* Life and Immortality to Light, *by giving us a full aſſurance of a* Future State, *concerning which the* Learnedeſt Heathens *confeſs'd their doubts: that ſhe has aſſur'd the* Sinner *of (what he cou'd never be certain of from the* Light of Nature) *not only* Pardon *and* Impunity, *but even of* Favour *and Eternal Happineſs, upon the eaſy terms of* Repentance: *that ſhe has given the World a* compleat and uniform Syſtem *of* Morality, *which, till then, lay ſcatter'd in the endleſs Writings of a* croud *of* Philoſophers; *attended with* Difficulties, Uncertainties, *and even* Contradictions: *and, laſtly, that ſhe has encourag'd and promoted the practice of virtue and goodneſs*

neſs by ſtronger Obligations, *by* nobler *and* better Motives, *and by ſuch* Duties *of a* Poſitive *Nature, as evidently tend more effectually to ſecure the Intereſts of* True Religion *in the world. All theſe, and many other, Advantages ſhe may now boaſt in vain. If this Author's* Scheme *takes place, ſhe muſt be contented for the future to ſtand upon the footing of* meer Natural Religion, *if not to give way to it, as the better and more Perfect Syſtem of the Two.*

When we conſider how eaſy and compendious *an* Hypotheſis *That of our Author's is, one wou'd think it might lye in the compaſs of a few Sheets, and be compriz'd, at moſt, in a* Shilling Pamphlet: *inſtead of which, out comes a* thick Quarto, *cloſely printed, in a ſmall Letter. He makes his Attack, not like a* light-arm'd Parthian, *with a Sling only, or a Bow; but* Goliah-like; *as if he thought by the* weight *and* bulk *of his armour to bear down Chriſtianity, in ſpite of the Strongeſt Oppoſition. And yet, arm'd as this* Champion *is at preſent, he is but* half equipp'd; *for we are threatned with* Volume the Second; *Which, from the practice of all Authors, Antient and Modern, I preſume will not be inferior, in bulk and ſize, to this he has*

has already favour'd the world with. And yet I will venture to assure the Reader, that the Substance of this formidable *work might be drawn up even in a less compass, than what I have mention'd.*

If any one, who has not read our Author's performance, is curious to know by what arts he has swell'd so brief *an* Hypothesis *to so* large *a size; He has done it, first, by expressing the same Proposition in a great* variety *of Language; for, to do him justice, he is a dextrous* master *of the* noble Science *of* Tautology: *next, by many and long* Quotations *from our most eminent* English Divines, *and others; whose sentiments concerning the Excellency and Perfection of Natural Religion he has endeavour'd to accommodate to his own System; so that were you only to turn over the Leaves, and observe the* great Names *cited in the* Margin, *you wou'd imagine, that* Tillotson, Locke, Barrow, Stanhope, Sherlock, *&c. were all of the same Sentiments with the Ingenious Dr.* T—l: *in the next place, by a long detail of the sad consequences, and extream mischiefs, of* Bigotry, Priestcraft, *and* Superstition; *in which, it must be confess'd, he has laid out a great deal of* Rhetorick, *and* Reading:

Reading: *and laſtly by numberleſs* miſapplications *and* miſinterpretations *of Scripture.*

But there is one Beauty *in his manner of treating the ſubject, which I cannot help taking notice of, and that is* The Dialogue. " *This (he tells us in his* " Preface) *was by the Antients eſteem'd* " *the moſt proper, as well as prudent,* " *Way of expoſing prevailing Abſurdi-* " *ties; and* Tully's *two Books* De Na- " tura Deorum, *and* De Divinatione, " *both levell'd againſt the ſuperſtition of* " *his country-men, are living monuments* " *of the uſefulneſs and expediency of this* " *manner of writing.*" *I entirely agree with him in his approbation of this manner of writing. But how has he copied theſe* excellent Originals? *In* Cicero's *Pieces the Perſons of the Dialogue are all allow'd fair Play. Whatever can be pleaded on either ſide of the Queſtion is fairly produc'd.* Tully's *own Sentiments are generally diſſembled, whilſt he holds the Balance with an impartial hand between the* Stoick, *the* Academick, *and the* Epicurean. *But How different is our Author's Coudu&t? The Perſons of* his Dialogue *are* A. *and* B.— A. *is the* little-Hero *of the Argument; and poor* B. *is only introduc'd, to give the* doughty Diſputant *an Opportunity of exulting in*

the ſuperiority of his underſtanding. Whatever he ſays is very little to the purpoſe: he even fancies Difficulties, *where there are none. Thus the One ſubmits before he is confuted, and the Other* triumphs without a victory. *This* Artifice *of our Author's puts me in mind of the* awkward Excuſe, *which* Bayes, *in* the Rehearſal, *makes for the* ſillineſs *and* impertinence *of one of his* Characters, *which was, that* he underwrit that part on purpoſe to ſet off the reſt.

I might obſerve, likewiſe, an Impropriety *(not to ſay a* contradiction) *in the very* Title of his Book. *For if the* Goſpel *be but* a Republication of the Law of Nature, *how can* Chriſtianity be as old as the Creation; *unleſs the* Republication *of a* Law *can be as old as* the Law itſelf? *Suppoſe the* Subſtance *of a* Law, *made in the Reign of* Harry the eighth, *be* re-enacted *in That of* George the Second, *wou'd it be proper, or even true, to ſay, that the* latter *Act of Parliament bears the* ſame date *with the former, becauſe the* Subſtance *of them both is* the ſame? — *Is the late* Dr. Clarke's new Edition of Homer as old *as the* Poem itſelf? *I deſign not to quarel with him for a meer* Inaccuracy, *or* Impropriety *of Expreſſion, ſince his meaning is plain enough. My rea-*

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ſon for this Remark is, becauſe he has evidently borrowed the Title of his Book from the preſent Biſhop of Bangor's Sermon before the Societies for the Propagation of the Goſpel. (vid. Chriſt. as old, &c. p. 79.) But, ſurely, it is one thing to ſay, with his Lordſhip, that The Goſpel (or Chriſtianity) is DECLARATIVE of THAT RELIGION, WHICH was as old as the Creation; and another, to ſay, with our Author, that Chriſtianity, ITSELF is as old as the Creation.

Before I finiſh my Preface, it may be proper to acquaint the Reader with the Method I intend to purſue, in anſwering the Author of Chriſtianity as old as the Creation, &c. Tho' the Objections, which he has ſtarted againſt the Chriſtian Revelation, be what he had Principally in view, as the true End and Deſign of his Scheme; yet, to ſet out with an immediate Reply to thoſe Objections is, I apprehend, to begin at the wrong end of the Controverſy; ſince, if he can but eſtabliſh his General Hypotheſis, that Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only in the manner of their being communicated, Chriſtianity muſt fall of courſe, as will appear, when we come to conſider the neceſſary conſequences of it. It is, therefore, the Buſineſs of this firſt Part, with which I now preſent

the Reader, to cut off this Retreat, this Dernier Reſort, *and to deſtroy the very Foundation, upon which All his Arguments againſt the Expediency and Uſe of* Divine Revelation *are founded: and that, by ſtating the* true Notion *of the* Perfection *of* Natural Religion *(the grand ſupport of our Author's* Hypotheſis) *in ſuch a manner, as to avoid the two Extreams of Aſſerting, with* Him, Natural Religion *to be* Abſolutely Perfect; *with* others, *to be Abſolutely* Imperfect; *and to leave Room for God Almighty to give his Creatures* Occaſional Laws, *as their Wants and Exigencies may require. The Reader will likewiſe here ſee the* true foundation, *upon which alone the* Expediency *of* Revelation *can be built.*

In my next Part I propoſe to conſider the other Branch of this Author's Scheme; which is, that No Poſitive Precepts can be a Part either of Natural or Reveal'd Religion: *A Point, which, in his opinion, can alone decide the Queſtion,* Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion do really differ.

When this is done, it will be, then, *proper to anſwer this Author's moſt* material Objections *to the Credit and Authority of* Revelation in general, *and* The Chriſtian in particular.

THAT

THAT it is the *real* Deſign of the Author of *Chriſtianity as old as the Creation*, &c. to ſet aſide the *Goſpel Revelation*, not only as *uſeleſs*, but even *prejudicial*, to mankind, is very plain, notwithſtanding his repeated profeſſions to the contrary, from the very different Lights, in which he has ſeverally plac'd *Natural* and *Reveal'd Religion*. The former he every where deſcribes as *abſolutely ſufficient*, alike at *all times*, for all the purpoſes of Human *Happineſs*, and, among others, beſtows on it this glorious Encomium, that " If the higheſt inter-
" nal Excellence, the greateſt Plainneſs
" and Simplicity, Unanimity, Univerſa-
" lity, and Antiquity, nay Eternity, can
" recommend a Law; all theſe do, in

" an eminent degree, belong to the " Law of Nature; a Law, which does " not depend on the uncertain meaning " of Words and Phraſes in dead Lan- " guages, much leſs on Types, Meta- " phors, Allegories, and Parables; or " on the skill, or honeſty, of weak, or " deſigning, Tranſcribers (not to men- " tion Tranſlators) but on the immuta- " ble Relations of Things, always vi- " ſible to the whole World:" (*p.* 64.) whereas *Revelation*, beſides that it is encumber'd with all the abovemention'd Difficulties and Uncertainties, from which the *Law of Nature* is free, is re- ſented, as frequently contradicting the Nature and Reaſon of Things; as be- ing of doubtful and uncertain Evidence; as Partial and Ineffectual to the Purpo- ſes, for which it was given; and as ha- ving been actually the Cauſe of Infinite Inconveniencies and miſchiefs to man- kind.

It is true, our Author does not open- ly avow this *hoſtile* deſign againſt the Chriſtian Revelation: on the Contrary, *His* is the moſt *Healing* Scheme imagi- nable; is calculated " greately to ad- " vance the Honour of *External* Reve- " lation, by ſhewing the perfect Agree- " ment between *That* and *Internal* Re- " velation;

" velation; and, by ſo doing, deſtroys " one of the moſt ſucceſsful Attempts, " that has been made on Religion, by " ſetting the Laws of God at variance." (*p.* 8.) And it muſt be confeſs'd, to the Honour of this Gentleman's Scheme, that He has luckily hit upon a moſt infallible method of *Reconciling* Natural and Reveal'd Religion, and that is, by making 'em both, *in all reſpects*, exactly *the Same*; and *Chriſtianity* muſt for the future moſt unnaturally quarrel with *Itſelf*, if it is any longer *at variance* with the *Law of Nature*.

But the Truth is, He pays Revelation but an aukward Compliment; and the mask of pretended Friendſhip is too thin a diſguiſe to cover and conceal the Real Foe. He treats *Revelation* juſt as *Epicurus* did the *Gods*; of whom it was obſerv'd, that, *tho' in words he acknowledg'd a Deity, yet in reality and effect, he denied his Exiſtence* *; and, as that old *Philoſopher*, by excluding the *Providence* of the Gods from the Government of Human Affairs, did, to all the purpoſes of Religion, deſtroy their Exiſtence, and conſequentially eſta-

* Epicurum verbis reliquiſſe Deos, re ſuſtuliſſe. *Cic. de Nat. Deorum. lib.* 2.

bliſh downright *Atheiſm*; Our Author, by making *Revelation* of *no Uſe* or Advantage to the World, does as effectually take away its *Reality*, and by neceſſary conſequence muſt recur to abſolute *Deiſm*.

To evince the Juſtice of this Charge, we ſhall not at preſent appeal to his particular Treatment of the *Chriſtian Revelation*. His Objections to the *Goſpel Scheme* are but the Sallies and Excurſions of an Enemy from his Head Quarters, and intended to illuſtrate and exemplify his *General Hypotheſis*; which being deſign'd to ſtrike at *all poſſible Revelation*, is an Argument, *a priori*, againſt That *particular One* of the Goſpel.

For I deſire it may be conſider'd, whether to aſſert, that *Natural and Reveal'd Religion* cannot poſſibly *differ* but *in the manner of their being communicated*, be not greatly to *leſſen*, if not entirely *deſtroy*, all Uſe and Expediency of the latter. For is it not directly to affirm, that *Reveal'd Religion* can teach us nothing, but what *Natural Religion* had *ſufficiently* inſtructed us in before; or, in other words, that it is inconſiſtent with the Infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, to make *any* diſcovery of his

his Will to mankind, by *expreſs Revelation*, to which his own unaſſiſted *Reaſon* cou'd not *as well* have led him without it?

If *Natural Reaſon* alone be, at *all times*, a *ſufficient Guide* in matters of Religion, I wou'd ask this Gentleman, zealous as he is for its Honour, What He has left for *Revelation* to perform? A Man wou'd be thought impertinent, who ſhou'd offer to direct another the right way, whom he ſaw provided of a *ſufficient Guide*. And is not *Revelation*, upon this Gentleman's Scheme, as uſeleſs, not to ſay impertinent, an Offer? If it be a juſt maxim in Natural Philoſophy, that *Nature does nothing in vain*, that all her operations are conducted by deſign, and for wiſe ends and purpoſes, can we ſuppoſe the *Author of Nature*, a Being of Infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, acting, in any of his diſpenſations to his Creatures, in vain and to no purpoſe? Thus this Gentleman, by aſcribing to *Natural Reaſon* an *abſolute ſufficiency* in religious matters, does, in effect, make *Revelation* of *no Uſe*, and, by neceſſary conſequence, denies its very *reality* and Exiſtence.

This conſequence I make no doubt he ſaw, and even deſign'd ſhou'd follow

low from his Hypotheſis, tho' at the expence of ſetting his Profeſſions at variance with his Principles, and being inconſiſtent with himſelf. However, as he grants, in words at leaſt, and as his Scheme neceſſarily ſuppoſes a *Revelation* to have been *actually* given to the World; let us try, whether this very Conceſſion may not be improv'd into a good Argument, *a priori*, why Reveal'd Religion ſhou'd, *in ſome reſpects, differ* from *Natural.*

I argue thus. If a Revelation be *actually* given to the World, it muſt be given for ſome *reaſon*, or for none. If for ſome, I ask, What was That reaſon? I am ſure our Author will agree with me, that Man, in his *Original* State and Condition, ſtood in no need of Revelation. It follows, then, (ſince God cannot be ſuppos'd to give it, when it was not wanted) that there muſt have happen'd ſome *change* in the condition of Human Nature. This *Change*, then, whatever it was, and however it came to paſs, was the *Ground* and *Reaſon* of the Revelation. And if ſo, is it not reaſonable to conclude, that a *Reveal'd* Religion, the *Expediency* of which is built upon a ſuppos'd *Alteration* in the State of Human Nature, ſhou'd,

ſhou'd, in *ſome reſpects*, *differ* from meer *Natural Religion*, which was the Religion of mankind in its original, primitive, State? — It is not my buſineſs, at preſent, to ſhew, in *what* reſpects Reveal'd Religion differs from Natural: It is ſufficient for my preſent purpoſe to demonſtrate the Reaſonableneſs of concluding, *a priori*, that it *may* do ſo in *ſome* reſpects.

I confeſs, Our Author's Scheme is not quite ſo inconſiſtent with itſelf, as to ſuppoſe any *real change* to have happen'd in Human Nature. He even reaſons from the contrary Suppoſition, that it has been always *the Same*; tho', in this opinion, he plainly runs counter to Reaſon, Hiſtory, and Experience. Yet I deſire it may be obſerv'd, from the foregoing Chain of Argument, that the Suppoſition of an *actual Revelation* being given to the World does, of itſelf, without the ſupports of Hiſtory, or Experience, clearly infer *ſome Change* to have really happen'd. What an additional ſtrength, then, muſt this Reaſoning receive, when Hiſtory and Experience unite in confirming its Truth and Juſtneſs, and in demonſtrating *that* to have really come to paſs, which Reaſon alone, from the conſide-

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ration of an *Actual Revelation* might juſtly infer to have happen'd? And, as from hence we deduce the Suppoſition of a *Change* in the condition of Human Nature; ſo this conſequence, you ſee, evidently leads to another, namely, that *Reveal'd* Religion is really *Diſtinct* from *Natural*; which, at once, overthrows this Author's Hypotheſis of making 'em both, in all reſpects, exactly *the ſame.*

To apply this Argument, briefly, to the Caſe of *Chriſtianity*. In the *original* State of Mankind, as Human Nature came Pure and Unſullied out of the Hands of its Creator, *Natural Reaſon* was its only Guide, and a *ſufficient Guide* it undoubtedly was. After a Revolution of a certain Number of Years, an *expreſs Revelation* appears, from unqueſtionable Proofs, to have been given to the World. This (agreeably to the foregoing Reaſoning) implies ſome *Alteration* to have happen'd in the condition of Human Nature. What this Change was, The Hiſtory of Mankind, The Complaints of Moraliſts, together with our own Experience, ſufficiently inform us; and it appears to have been an almoſt General *Defection from Nature and right Reaſon*, a *Depravity* of *Manners*

Manners and *Judgment*, propagated, and confirm'd by *Education*, *Cuſtom*, and *Example*; * in ſhort, a Change of Man

C from

* " Simul atque editi in Lucem, & ſuſcepti ſumus,
" in omni continuo *pravitate*, & in ſummâ *opinionum*
" *perverſitate*, verſamur; ut pene cum lacte nutricis er-
" rorem ſuxiſſe videamur. Cum vero *parentibus* reddi-
" ti, deinde *magiſtris* traditi ſumus, tum ita variis im-
" buimur erroribus, ut vanitati veritas, & opinioni con-
" firmatæ *Natura ipſa* cedat. Cum vero accedit eodem,
" quaſi maximus quidem magiſter, *Populus*, atque omnis
" undique ad vitia conſentiens multitudo, tum plane *in-*
" *ficimur* opinionum pravitate, *a naturaque ipſâ deſciſci-*
" *mus*. Cic. Tuſc. Queſt. lib. 3.

Our Author, in his 14th Chapter, *(which is wholly level'd againſt the late* Dr. Clarke's Evidences of Natural and Reveal'd Religion) *makes the following remark upon the Doctor's quoting this very paſſage.*

" *The Dr. (ſays he) having taken a large paſſage from*
" Cicero, *where the Orator very rhetorically deſcribes the*
" *great corruptions of his times, and aſſigns the cauſes*
" *thereof, makes this remark*, that a livelier deſcription
" of the *preſent* corrupt State of Human Nature is not
" eaſily to be met with: *which I think is ſufficiently*
" *owning, that Human Nature* at preſent *is far from be-*
" *ing exalted to ſo high a ſtate of perfection, or in the*
" *leaſt mended.* (p. 402.)

I cannot anſwer this remark better, than in the words of the ingenious Dr. Stebbing, " *The Gentleman thinks,*
" *it ſeems, that notwithſtanding the ſuppos'd virtue of the*
" *Goſpel to reform Mankind, the world is not one jot the*
" *better for it; and he would be very glad to perſuade*
" *you, that Dr.* Clarke *was of the ſame opinion But*
" *what does the Doctor ſay? Why, that the deſcription,*
" *which* Cicero *gave of Human Nature in* his *time, agrees*
" *with the corrupted State of mankind in this: Very well,*
" *and whoever looks into the paſſage of* Cicero, *cited by*
" *Dr.* Clarke, *will find that it does. But what then?*
" *Did the Doctor mean to ſay, that the State of mankind*
" *is not* in the leaſt mended *by the coming in of the Gof-*

" *pel?*

from an *Upright* and *Innocent*, to a *depravʼd* and *ſinful*, Creature. Hence, then, muſt ariſe the *Expediency* of the *Chriſtian Revelation*; and, therefore, as *Natural* Religion was the Religion of *Innocent*, unoffending Mankind; *Revealʼd* Religion may very properly be defin'd to be *the Religion* of the *ſame* Mankind, in its *ſinful*, offending, State. Now, as the *Circumſtances* of Human Nature, to which Natural and Reveal'd Religion muſt be ſuppos'd *reſpectively* adapted, evidently appear to be *different*, here is room for the *Religious themſelves*, in *ſome* reſpects, to *differ*. And there is great Reaſon to think, that *Other means* were wanting, in the *corrupt* Eſtate of Mankind, to *reſtore*, and ſecure, the Intereſts of *Virtue* and Goodneſs, than were neceſſary to have *continuʼd* them, before it had degenerated, and become corrupt.

Thus far I have argu'd only *ex conceſſo*. The Reader will obſerve, that this Reaſoning is not deſign'd as a compleat determination of the point in que-

" *pel? No ſuch matter. He ſpeaks* here *of Human Na-*
" *ture*, as ſuch, *and abſtracted from any Influence or Im-*
" *provement from the Goſpel. And, in this ſenſe, it is*
" *certain, that Human Nature is* now, *and was* then,
" *exactly the ſame*". *Defence of Dr.* Clarke. p. 93. & 94.

ſtion.

ſtion. All, that is here aim'd at, is to ſhew the inconſiſtency of ſuppoſing an *actual Revelation*, and at the ſame time making it to be nothing more, than *meer Natural Religion*; and that the very ſuppoſition implies a *propable* Ground or Reaſon of *ſome difference* between them. But, becauſe it will be neceſſary entirely to lay open the fallacy of an *Hypotheſis*, which is deſign'd, under the pretence of *reconciling* Reveal'd Religion with Natural, to ſuperſede the Uſe and Expediency of the Former, and conſequently to deſtroy the Credit and Authority of the *Goſpel-Revelation*; I go on to conſider our Author's Reaſoning in ſupport of it.

It wou'd be tedious, and indeed unneceſſary, to follow him thro' all the turnings and windings of an Hypotheſis, which he has wiredrawn thro' above four hundred Pages in *Quarto*, and to view each particular Argument in the variety of Lights he has ſet it. This would ſwell the Criticiſm to a larger ſize, than the Performance it cenſures. But there is a *paſſage* in his *firſt Chapter*, which is both the *Ground-work* and *Summary* of his whole *Scheme*; the reſt of his long, elaborate, Treatiſe being but a large *Comment* or *Reading* up-

on the Arguments there advanc'd. I beg leave, therefore, to produce the paſſage, at length, becauſe I wou'd not be thought to diſſemble any part of the force of this Gentleman's Reaſoning.

It is thus introduc'd.

B. (One of the perſonages of the *dialogue)* informs his friend, (*A.*) that he had been " in company with a " great many clergy-men, at a Biſhop's " primary Viſitation; where the com- " plaint was general of the coldneſs " and indifferency, with which people " receiv'd the Speculative points of " Chriſtianity, and all its holy rites, " for which they had formerly Shewn " ſo great a zeal. This coldneſs (he " tells him) they imputed to thoſe *Low-* " *church-men*, who lay the main ſtreſs " on Natural Religion; and withal ſo " magnify the doctrine of *Sincerity*, as " in effect to place All Religions on a " level, where the Profeſſors are alike " Sincere". *(p.* 1.)

I paſs over that part of *A*'s reply, which concerns the doctrine of *Sincerity*, with only this ſhort remark, that he evades giving a direct anſwer to the objection; only aſſerting, that " a ſin-

" cere

" cere examination (into religious mat-
" ters) muſt always make men accep-
" table to God;" which is very true, but no ſolution of the difficulty; ſince it will never follow, that, becauſe a Pagan and a Chriſtian are *equally ſincere*, therefore their Religions are *equally good.*

As to the other of the *two important points*, he replys directly, that " too " great ſtreſs can't be laid on *Natural* " Religion," which (as he takes it) " differs not from *Reveal'd*, but in *the* " *manner of its being communicated*; the " one being the *internal*, as the other " the *external Revelation* of the *ſame* un-
" changeable *will* of a *Being*, who is " *at all times* infinitely *Wiſe* and *Good*". *(p.* 3.)

Surpriz'd at the *Novelty* of this *Hypotheſis*, *B*, replys, " Surely, Sir, this " muſt be extreamly Heterodox. Can " you believe, that *Natural* and *Re-*
" *veal'd* Religion differ only in the " manner of their being convey'd to " us?" Then follows the Proof of the Propoſition; in which our Author plays the *Socrates*, and reaſons from the conceſſions of his Pupil, in the following manner.

" *A*

" *A.* As Heterodox, as I may ſeem " at preſent, I doubt not, but by asking " you a few queſtions, to let you See I " advance nothing in *this point* without " Reaſon; and, in order to it, I deſire " to be inform'd, whether *God* has not " from the beginning given mankind " ſome Rule or Law for their conduct; " and whether the obſerving That did " not make 'em acceptable to him".

" *B.* There can be no doubt, but " the obſerving ſuch a Law muſt have " anſwer'd the End, for which it was " given, and made Men acceptable to " God.

" *A.* What more can any *External* " *Revelation* do, than render Men ac- " ceptable to God? — Again,

" If *God*, then, from the beginning, " gave Men *a Religion*, was That Re- " ligion perfect, or imperfect?

" *B.* Moſt Perfect, no doubt; ſince " no Religion can come from a Being " of infinite wiſdom and perfection, " but what is *abſolutely perfect*.

" *A.* Can therefore a Religion, *abſo-* " *lutely perfect*, admit of any Alteration, " or be capable of Addition, or Dimi- " nution, and not be as immutable as " the Author of it? Can Revelation " *add* any thing to a Religion, thus

" abſolutely

" abſolutely perfect, univerſal, and im-
" mutable? — Beſides, If *God* has gi-
" ven mankind a Law, he muſt have
" given them likewiſe *Sufficient means*
" of *knowing* it; he wou'd otherwiſe
" have defeated his own Intent in gi-
" ving it; ſince a Law, as far as it is
" unintelligible, ceaſes to be a Law.
" Shall we ſay, that God, who had
" the forming human underſtanding,
" as well as his own Laws, did not
" know how to adjuſt the one to the
" other?

" If God at all times was *willing*
" *all men ſhou'd come to the knowledge*
" *of his Truth*, cou'd not his infinite
" Power at all times find ſufficient
" means for making mankind capable
" of knowing, what his infinite Good-
" neſs deſign'd they ſhou'd know?

" *B.* I grant you, that God was al-
" ways willing, that All men ſhou'd
" come to the knowledge of his Truth;
" and we ſay, that the *Chriſtian* Reli-
" gion, being the only true and abſo-
" lutely perfect Religion, was what
" God, from the beginning, deſign'd
" for all mankind.

" *A.* If ſo, it follows, that the *Chri-*
" *ſtian* Religion has exiſted from the be-
" ginning; and that God both *Then*, and

" *ever*

" *ever ſince*, has continu'd to give to all " Mankind ſufficient means to know it; " and that it is their duty to know, be- " lieve, profeſs, and practice it; So that " *Chriſtianity*, tho' the name be of la- " ter date, muſt be *as old*, and as ex- " tenſive, as Human Nature, and, as " the Law of our Creation, muſt have " been then implanted in us by God " himſelf.

By ſuch kind of Reaſoning, as this, Our Author endeavours to prove *Chriſtianity* to be *as old as the Creation*, or, in other words, nothing more than the *Law of Nature differently communicated.* As it is very evident, with what view this Hypotheſis is advanc'd; that the real deſign of it is to ſet aſide Reveal'd Religion, as of no Uſe to mankind; it will be neceſſary, in vindication of the Chriſtian Inſtitution, to detect the Fallacy of this Reaſoning; which I flatter my ſelf I ſhall be able to do, in the following Remarks on it.

Firſt, then, He begins with asking, " Whether GOD has not from the be- " ginning given Mankind ſome Rule or " Law for their conduct?" This is allow'd him, and upon this foundation he goes on to build *the Abſolute Perfection of the Religion of Nature.* But I beg leave

leave to ſtop our *modern Socrates* awhile in his full career of Interrogatories, in order to enquire, in what ſenſe *Natural Religion* may be ſaid to be *given* us by *God himſelf*. This will be found to be no unneceſſary Queſtion, when we come to ſtate the true notion of the *Perfection* of *Natural Religion*. Now, as we receive our *Reaſoning Faculties*, no leſs than our *Exiſtence*, from *God*, whatever, by the due uſe of them, we diſcover to be his Will, may, *in ſome ſenſe*, be ſaid to be a *Rule* given us by *God himſelf*; tho', *ſtrictly ſpeaking*, it muſt be referr'd to the Exerciſe of our *Reaſon*, as its *immediate Source* and Origin. Mr. *Locke* has, I think, clearly ſhewn, that the Human Mind has no *Innate Idea*, even of the *Deity* himſelf; much leſs can we ſuppoſe an *Innate Religion*, a Scheme of Duties, written originally on Man's Heart, and immediately diſcoverable to his infant Underſtanding. It is no difficult matter to trace all our knowledge of the Nature of God, and the Duties ariſing from thence, from the firſt *impreſſions* made on our *Senſes*, by *External Objects*, thro' the ſeveral *Operations* of the mind. *Senſation* lets in upon the Soul the diſtinct Ideas of the Greatneſs, Order, and Variety, of Natural Bodies

about us; and *Reflection* from theſe materials ſtrikes out *a Deity*. This noble Idea becomes the pregnant Mother of all our Notions of Adoration, and Prayer, and the whole Syſtem of Moral Virtues. Here, then, you have the *true Source*, and Origin, of *Natural Religion*. It is the immediate Reſult of *Natural Reaſon*, and flows from the due Exerciſe of thoſe faculties, which God has given us; and therefore can only be *ultimately* referr'd to him, as the *Author* and Giver of thoſe faculties. The caſe is much the ſame, as in the Acquirement of Arts and Sciences. The faculty of *Invention*, it is true, is the Gift of Heaven; but the diſcovery itſelf is our own; not that I wou'd infer from hence, that the knowledge of our Duty is as difficult to be attain'd, as a ſkill in the *Mathematicks*. Let Natural Religion be as *plain*, as you pleaſe, ſo plain, that *he, that runs, may read it*; yet ſtill it muſt be *read*; we muſt exerciſe our Reaſon about the Relations we ſtand in to God, and one another, before we can have any knowledge of the Duties, which flow from thoſe Relations; and this is all I contend for.

This, then, is what eſſentially diſtinguiſhes *Natural* from *Reveal'd* Religion, that

that the former is a Diſcovery of *our own*, and what Reaſon collects from the apparent Nature of Things; but the latter is founded upon the expreſs Declaration and Interpoſition of God himſelf: and therefore it is very plain, in what ſenſe alone it can be ſaid, that *God has from the beginning given mankind ſome Rule or Law for their conduct*; and that is, by giving them ſuch abilities of Reaſon and Underſtanding, as to be able, by the due Uſe and Exerciſe of them, to form to themſelves ſome Rule or Law.

But does not Our Author manifeſtly confound this diſtinction between the true Source of Natural, and that of Reveal'd Religion? Does not His manner of Expreſſion inſinuate, as if the Supream Being, immediately upon the Creation of Man, did, in perſon, or by an expreſs meſſenger from heaven, give him *a Religion*, and inſtitute a ſett of Duties, to be the Eternal Rule, and Law, of his Conduct? And, is not this plain from the uſe he makes of it, in ſuppoſing Natural Religion to be an *abſolutely* perfect Religion, for this very reaſon, as *coming from a Being of Infinite Perfection?* This, I own, is artfully enough contriv'd to prejudice the incautious Reader; and, by blending the *Idea*

of *Revelation* with that of *Natural Religion*, admirably ſerves an Hypotheſis, which is to prove 'em both to be *the ſame*; tho' at the expence of this plain contradiction (which perhaps he was not aware of) that, whilſt he excepts *the manner of their being communicated*, he expreſſes himſelf, as if they were communicated after the *ſame manner*. But, The truth is, His manner of arguing oblig'd him to make uſe of this *ambiguous* Account of the origin of Natural Religion. For had he, in expreſs terms, aſſerted, that *Man* had, *from the beginning*, by the exerciſe of his *Reaſon*, form'd to himſelf *ſome Rule or Law for his conduct*, he wou'd have been at a loſs to have infer'd from thence the *abſolute Perfection* of the *Religion* of *Nature*.

But to go on; It being allow'd him (as he thinks it muſt) that *God has, from the beginning, given Mankind ſome Rule or Law for his conduct*; and that *the obſervation* of that Rule *muſt render men acceptable to God*; he aſks, with an air of triumph, " What more can any Ex-
" ternal Revelation do, than render Men
" acceptable to God?" But what can reaſonably be concluded from hence? Why nothing more, than that the *End*, the Deſign, the Aim, both of Natural and

Reveal'd

Reveal'd Religion are *the ſame*, not that the *Religions themſelves* are ſo; unleſs he can prove it impoſſible to attain the ſame End, by different means, under different circumſtances.

But the favourite Argument, and that upon which he lays the greateſt ſtreſs, is the *Abſolute Perfection of the Religion of Nature:* and to put it paſt all doubt, in what ſenſe he underſtands Natural Religion to be *abſolutely perfect*, he excludes from it all poſſibility of *Alteration*, *Addition*, or *Diminution*; i. e. in plain terms, The *Religion of Nature* is *ſo perfect*, as to be incapable of receiving any *Improvement* from *Revelation.*

At preſent, I wave all conſideration of the *corruption* and *depravity* of Human Nature. Let the Natural *Reaſon* of mankind have all the *Perfection* you can ſuppoſe it capable of; and let us examine, whether the *Religion of Nature*, even upon this Suppoſition, can be ſaid to be *abſolutely perfect.* And here we muſt take into the queſtion the foregoing account of the *origin* of Natural Religion; which will, I think, help us to a true Eſtimate of its *perfection*: For, if the *Natural Religion* of Mankind ſprings from the due *Exerciſe* of their *Rational* Faculties, Its *Perfection* (to ſpeak

ſpeak with the *Mathematicians)* muſt be in a *given Ratio* to the *Perfection* of Human *Reaſon:* i. e. the Religion of Nature is more or leſs perfect, in proportion as Human Reaſon is more or leſs ſo. *Happineſs*, *Reaſon*, and *Religion*, have a cloſe and intimate connection and dependance on each other, and, like the ſeveral *Quantities* in a *Series* of *Proportionals*, vary together. Thus a *given degree* of *Happineſs*, to be attain'd, requires a *proportionable* ſhare of *Reaſon*, in order to attain it; and a *determinate degree* of *Reaſon* will always produce a *Religion*, whoſe *Perfection* will be in an exact *Ratio* or *Proportion* to it.

The Queſtion, then, recurs to this; whether the *Natural Reaſon* of mankind in its pureſt and moſt uncorrupted ſtate, be *abſolutely perfect*. But ſure the fondeſt Advocates for the *ſufficiency* of Human Reaſon never aſſerted it to be ſo. It is certain, God has given to different, intelligent, Creatures different degrees of Reaſon and Underſtanding. Thus *Angels* muſt excel *Men* in the Strength and Capacity of their intellectual faculties, as much as the *Angelic* is ſuperior, in the ſcale of Exiſtence, to the *Human* Nature. And, therefore, as all *Rational* Beings muſt have their *proper Religion*, will

will it not follow, that *the Religion of Angels* (which muſt ariſe, as well as *That* of *Men*, from the Knowledge they have of the *Nature* and *Relations* of *things)* muſt not *their Religion*, I ſay, be ſo much more perfect, than *that* of *men*, in proportion as the apprehenſions and underſtandings of theſe *exalted* Creatures are more enlarg'd and extenſive, than *thoſe* of the *Human Race?* Conſequently the *natural Religion* of *Mankind* cannot be ſaid to be *abſolutely perfect.*

And this very naturally leads us to the *true Notion* of its *Perfection*; which can be no more than this, that it is *ſufficient*, if duly attended to, for all the purpoſes of *Human Happineſs:* i. e. *Natural Reaſon, unprejudic'd* and *uncorrupt*, is *ſufficient* to guide us to all *that Happineſs*, for the enjoyment of which our Creator form'd us. To explain this farther. Whatever is ſufficient to produce the End, propos'd to be attain'd by it, is ſo far *perfect.* I ſay *ſo far* only: for, conſider'd in another Light, it may really be *imperfect.* If I have *ſtrength* enough of Body to perform with eaſe all the functions of Life, my ſtrength is, with reſpect to me, *Perfect*; tho' I have not the Limbs and Force of a *Giant.* I may have *Light* enough, by the friendly

friendly Aid of the *Moon*, to direct me in the right road, and ſecure me from the danger of ſtumbling, tho' I cannot, at that time, enjoy the Light of the Noon-day *Sun*. In both caſes, the *Strength*, I act by, and the *Light*, that guides me, are *ſufficient* for the End propos'd, and conſequently, in that reſpect, *Perfect*, tho' were my ſtrength to be compar'd with that of a Giant, or the faint beams of the Moon with that full ſplendor of Day, which the meridian Sun affords, they wou'd each be found, in the compariſon, to be in reality *Imperfect*.

Apply this to the caſe of *Natural Religion*. The End, propos'd by God, in the production of mankind, was, without doubt, the Happineſs of his Creatures. For this purpoſe, he gave them *Reaſon*, to enable them to diſtinguiſh between Good and Evil, and to diſcover the will of their Creator, or, which is the ſame thing, to diſcern what Actions and Duties the ſeveral Relations they ſtood in to God, and one another, naturally and neceſſarily requir'd of them: and the due obſervation of theſe Duties, thus diſcover'd, was undoubtedly *ſufficient* to conduct them to all the Happineſs, of which their Natures were capable,

ble. Tho' the *Reaſon* of *Men* be not ſo *Strong*, as that of *Angels*; tho' Nature does not hold out ſo bright and glaring a *Light* to the former, as ſhe does to the latter; yet has Man no cauſe of complaint, that his Reaſon is not *ſufficiently* ſtrong, or that he is left to grope uncertainly, in the dark, in ſearch of his Duty, for want of Light enough from Nature to lead him directly and unerringly to it. In this ſenſe therefore, *Natural Religion*, as being a *Sufficient Rule*, was a *Perfect* One.

But will not this ſuperſede the Uſe of *Divine Revelation?* If God has, from the beginning, *ſufficiently* provided for Human Happineſs, to what purpoſe any *new* diſcovery of his Will? This is the very Scope of our Author's Argument, when he adds, " Beſides, if " God has given mankind a Law, he " muſt have given them likewiſe ſuffi- " cient means of knowing it; he wou'd " otherwiſe have defeated his own in- " tent in giving it; ſince a Law, as far " as it is unintelligible ceaſes to be a " Law. Shall we ſay, that God, who " had the forming human underſtand- " ing, as well as his own Laws, did not " know how to adjuſt the one to the " other?" and preſently after, " If God,

" at all times, was *willing all men ſhould* " *come to the knowledge of his truth*, " cou'd not his infinite wiſdom and " Power, *at all times*, find ſufficient " means, for making Men capable of " knowing, What his infinite Goodneſs " deſign'd they ſhou'd know?"

To which I reply, that God Almighty did actually *give* mankind *ſufficient means of knowing* this *Law*, by giving them the Faculty of *Reaſon:* but, tho' it be impoſſible to ſuppoſe God ſhou'd *himſelf defeat his own intent*, might not Man, by a gradual *corruption* of his Reaſon, *defeat* this *intent* of Providence; eſpecially, if we conſider him as, what he really is, a *Free-Agent*; which makes it improper for God to interpoſe, without *indeed defeating his own intent*, in giving him *Free-Will?* If the perfect knowledge of this Law depends upon an impartial Exerciſe of our Reaſoning Faculties, will not their being *deprav'd*, and prejudic'd by Cuſtom and Example, render the Law, tho' not abſolutely *unintelligible*, much more *difficult* to be underſtood, than originally it was; it making no difference in the preſent caſe, whether the Law itſelf be unintelligible, or the Faculties, by which only it can be apprehended, be impair'd, and become

come defective; as a Man is equally in the dark, whether the Light be remov'd from him, or his Eyes ſhut —? So that, tho' *Human Underſtanding* was originally *adjuſted to the Law of Nature*, it might become, thro' prejudice and corruption, incapable of a clear and thorough apprehenſion of it, and conſequently liable to great miſtakes about it. Thus, to illuſtrate the thing by a familiar Inſtance, The *Eye* is *adjuſted* to the *natural Colours* of Bodies; yet, to a man in a *jaundice* every thing appears tinctur'd with *yellow*. The ſame may be true of the *mind*'s *Eye*, which may be ſo far impair'd, as to judge wrong even of the plaineſt Laws of Nature. If therefore you take into the conſideration a *ſuppos'd Degeneracy* of Human Nature, *Natural Religion*, in ſuch a ſtate, will be (*relatively*, tho' not *abſolutely*) an *Imperfect*, becauſe an *Inſufficient*, Religion; for the ſame Reaſon, that, in the uncorrupt ſtate of Mankind, we ſay it was a *Perfect*, becauſe a *ſufficient*, Religion.

But it will be ſaid, Has this ſuppos'd Degeneracy of Human Nature any foundation in Truth and Reality? I am afraid, upon Examination, it will be found to be more than *Suppoſition*. If

Hiſtory is to be credited, if the complaints of moraliſts are juſtly grounded, Human Reaſon, in *general*, is exceedingly degenerate and corrupt. A few *great Minds*, indeed, there have been, A *Socrates*, A *Plato*, A *Cicero*, who were not *entirely* born down with the torrent of *Error*; but, alas!

Apparent rari nantes in gurgite vaſto.

and it muſt be remember'd, that when we aſſert the *Expediency* of Revelation, we mean, with regard to the *Bulk* of *mankind:* tho' were we to conſider the diverſity of opinions amongſt the greateſt Philoſophers, in points of the higheſt conſequence to religion, we might apply to the whole world, without exception, what the Author of the Book of *Baruch*, ſpeaking of *wiſdom*, ſays, " It hath not been heard of in *Canaan*, " neither hath it been ſeen in *Theman*. " The *Agareens*, that ſeek wiſdom up- " on Earth, the merchants of *Meran*, " of *Theman*, the Author's of Fables, " and ſearchers out of Underſtanding; " none of theſe have known the way of " wiſdom, or remember her Paths." *c.* 3. *v.* 22, 23.

You

You ſee, then, the Foundation, upon which the *Expediency* of Revelation is built; not any *Defect* in the *Original Law*, but One in *Human Underſtanding*. And, indeed, if we take a view of the world, before the Light of the Goſpel ſhone upon it, and ſee it deep ſunk in the darkneſs of Ignorance and Error; if we reflect on the *Idolatrous* Practices of Mankind, and conſider, that the *groſſeſt Immoralities*, inſtead of being diſcountenanc'd by Religion, were frequently made a part of it, we ſhall have reaſon ſufficient to think, that Mankind was, *for many ages, in a deplorable State, for want of an external Revelation*; notwithſtanding our Author's Argument to the contrary; which is, that " If God does " every thing, that is fit for him to do, " Men cou'd not be in ſuch ſtate, be- " cauſe God did not do a thing, which " was not fit for him to do, *viz.* make " a Revelation, before it was fit for him " to make it." *(p.* 195.) that is, I ſuppoſe, if Men had actually been in ſuch a deplorable ſtate, as I have deſcrib'd, it would have been fit for God to have made a Revelation of his will, and conſequently he would have done it; but, as in fact he did not do it, it follows, that Men were not in ſuch a ſtate. To which

which I anſwer, that Men might have been in ſuch a deplorable ſtate, and yet it might not have been fit for God, in thoſe ages, to make a Revelation of his will; for it ought to be conſider'd, that a *Revelation* is an *Act* of *meer Favour*, not of *Juſtice*; and ſurely God was no more oblig'd to *reſtore* a Creature, *fallen* from his original Perfection, than he was to have created him, at firſt, without a poſſibility of falling. So that, had Mankind continu'd to the End of the World in the ſame deplorable State, I cannot ſee, that it wou'd have been any Impeachment of the divine Juſtice. If therefore it cannot be prov'd from the Attribute of Juſtice, that God *ought* to have given mankind a Revelation, may there not have been wiſe Reaſons, which we are unacquainted with, why He defer'd doing, what he was not *oblig'd* to do at all, to a more diſtant period of Time? The Subſtance of what I have here advanc'd, upon this ſubject of the *Perfection* and *Sufficiency* of *Natural Religion*, is briefly this.

The *Religion of Nature* is the *immediate* Reſult, or Production, of *Human Reaſon*. And, therefore, when we ſay, that "God has from the beginning gi-"ven mankind ſome Rule or Law for "his

" his conduct," we can only mean As he is the *Author* and Giver of thoſe *Reaſoning faculties*, by the due exerciſe of which we diſcover his Will. And, therefore,

Even in the *uncorrupted* Eſtate of Human Nature, *Natural Religion* cannot be ſaid to be *abſolutely perfect*, becauſe *Natural Reaſon*, from whence it flows, is not *abſolutely perfect*; but its *Perfection* can only conſiſt in its *ſufficiency* to produce that *Happineſs*, for which mankind was form'd. But,

In the corrupt and *degenerate* condition of Human *Reaſon*, *Natural* Religion will be *(relatively* tho' not *abſolutely)* an *Imperfect*, becauſe an *Inſufficient*, Religion. And,

Upon this very foundation is built the *Expediency* of a *divine Revelation*; not on any *real Defect* in the *original* Law, but *One* in *Human Underſtanding*.

And thus far I have examin'd our Author's reaſoning in the fore-cited Paſſage, and flatter my ſelf, that, what I have here advanc'd, is ſomething more to the purpoſe, than the trifling Reply, which he has artfully put into the mouth of his Opponent. For all that *B.* ſays, upon the Occaſion is this. " I grant " you, that God was always willing all

" Men

" Men ſhould come to the knowledge " of true Religion; and we ſay, that " the Chriſtian Religion, being the on- " ly True and abſolutely perfect Reli- " gion, was what God, *from the begin-* " *ning*, deſign'd for all mankind." The true ſecret of making *B.* Reply, in this manner, diſcovers itſelf immediately, in the Uſe our Author makes of it. " If " ſo (ſays he) it follows, that the *Chri-* " *ſtian* Religion muſt have exiſted *from* " *the beginning*." If he will give me leave, for once, to help the poor Gentleman out, he ſhall anſwer in the following manner. ' I grant you, that God ' was always willing, that *All Men ſhou'd* ' *come to the knowledge of True Religion*; ' and therefore, he gave them *Rea-* ' *ſon*, the due Exerciſe of which wou'd ' infallibly have led them to it; but, ' thro' the gradual *corruptions* of Human ' Nature, it became, at length, exceed- ' ing *difficult* for the Bulk of mankind ' to arrive at the knowledge of True ' Religion, by the help of *unaſſiſted Reaſon* ' alone. *Revelation*, then, was plainly ' wanting; and the *Chriſtian* being, ' from unqueſtionable Proofs, the only ' *True Revelation*, and, among the ma- ' ny *inſtituted* Religions in the world, ' undeniably the beſt, was what God,

' *from*

‘ *from the beginning*, deſign'd ſhou'd be ‘ obſerv'd by *all thoſe*, to whom, in *his* ‘ *own* good appointed *time*, he ſhou'd be ‘ graciouſly pleas'd to *reveal* it '. This ought to have been the Anſwer. But he had it in his power to make the Gentleman expreſs himſelf, juſt as he thought fit; and it was wiſely done to frame ſuch a Reply for him, as ſhou'd directly infer the very Hypotheſis, which our Author was labouring to eſtabliſh.

And here I cannot but obſerve, how artfully he has endeavour'd to perplex the Subject with difficulties; not *ſuch* in reality, but meer Phantoms of his own raiſing; as, firſt, at Page the 7th; where poor *B.* is ſtrangely bewilder'd. He “ cannot deny Men's being acceptable “ to God, whatever their opinions may “ be; after having us'd all the means “ God has given them for the diſcovery “ of his Will;” and yet, “ he does not “ know how to admit it; for then, ſays “ he, (pray mind the reaſon) what Re- “ ligion ſoever men are of, That, I ſay, “ however oppoſite to Chriſtianity, muſt “ be the Religion God deſign'd for them.” But why ſo, pray? I own I was at a loſs to gueſs the reaſon, why a Religion, oppoſite to Chriſtianity, can poſſibly be a Religion, deſign'd for any part of man-

kind by God himſelf; till, caſting my Eye back, I ſtumbled upon this profound Argument; *viz.* that " If Men, " having done all in their power, all " that God requires of 'em, to find out " his will, ſhou'd fall into oppoſite ſen- " timents, muſt it not be *the will of* " *God, that it ſhou'd be ſo?* Can God *will* " ſuch an Examination, and not *will* " what he foreknows muſt be the ne- " ceſſary conſequence?" *(p.* 6.) which I will venture to leave with the Reader, without any reply.

But *B.* plunges ſtill deeper in *difficulty.* " On the other hand (ſays he) ſhou'd I " own, that the duly uſing thoſe means " wou'd have caus'd all Men to be of " one Religion, yet I cannot ſee how " that cou'd be the *Chriſtian* Religion, " *except it has exiſted from the beginning.*" Artful enough! But where's the neceſſity, that this *Univerſal Religion* muſt have been the *Chriſtian?* on the contrary, had all men been of one Religion, pure, uncorrupted, *Natural* Religion, there wou'd have been no Occaſion for *Chriſtianity.*

Having ſhewn, upon how falſe a foundation our Author's Hypotheſis is built, it will be eaſy to demonſtrate the inconcluſiveneſs of the following Arguments,

ments, among many others, by which he has endeavour'd to confirm his General Aſſertion, that *Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only in the manner of their being communicated.* As, firſt, He ſays,

" If God only commands, what the " Nature of things ſhews to be fit, it is " ſcarce poſſible, that Men (tho' now " endleſsly divided upon the account of " their different Traditions) ſhou'd mi- " ſtake their duty; ſince a Mind that is " attentive, can as eaſily diſtinguiſh *fit* " from *unfit*, as the Eye can Beauty from " Deformity, or the Ear Harmony from " Diſcord; and, if no commands can " alter the nature of things, or make " that fit, which is in itſelf unfit, Ex- " ternal Revelation muſt attend the Na- " ture and Relations of things, and can " *only* ſpeak what thoſe ſpeak." *(p.* 31.) Which is plainly ſuppoſing, that *Reaſon*, alone, is capable of determining every thing, which it is fit for God to command, even *antecedently* to the command itſelf: a very high Compliment to Human Reaſon; but which, in its greateſt perfection, I am afraid it does not deſerve. The utmoſt we can with any certainty affirm is, that, whenever God gives his Creatures any command, the

nature of things will ſhew it to be fit; the marks of wiſdom and goodneſs will plainly diſcover themſelves; and the attentive mind will perceive its fitneſs, as eaſily as the Eye diſtinguiſhes Beauty, or the Ear Harmony. But it will not follow, that therefore the Nature of things will point out to us, *a priori*, every thing, that is fit to be the ſubject of God's command; and that Human Reaſon is able previouſly to determine *every Law*, which the Supream Governor of the Univerſe ought to give his Creatures. Were this the caſe, we might reply to a *meſſenger* from Heaven, that he might ſpare himſelf the trouble of delivering his meſſage, ſince we were already, from the notices of our own Reaſon, appriz'd of his *Errand*. God, in his wiſe Providence, and ſuperintendency over Human Affairs, may ſee occaſion to give his Creatures Laws, which their own Foreſight cou'd not point out; but which will appear, when given, to be the reſult of conſummate Wiſdom. So that, tho' it be never ſo true, that External Revelation muſt attend the Nature and Reaſon of things, ſo far, as not to preſcribe any thing, which *contradicts* thoſe Relations; yet it is by no means a conſequence, that it can *only* ſpeak what they

they ſpeak. *Reveal'd* Religion may ſpeak *more* than *Natural*, provided the *Language of the former* do not contradict the *Voice of the latter*.

Hence, then, it is eaſy to anſwer the following Queſtions, which our Author immediately after puts. " Shou'd Re-
" velation require leſs, than thoſe rela-
" tions require, wou'd it not be an im-
" perfect Rule? And if it enjoyns more,
" wou'd it not argue the Author of it to
" be of a tyrannical Nature, impoſing
" on his ſubjects, and under ſevere Pe-
" nalties, unneceſſary things, and like-
" wiſe ſhew a deſign not of being be-
" loved, but hated and dreaded? And
" therefore thoſe, who ſee the conſe-
" quences of things, deſcribe the Chri-
" ſtian Religion as requiring ſuch things
" only, as, conſidering the Relations we
" ſtand in to God, and one another, are
" apparently for our Good." To which I reply, that it is a plain begging of the Queſtion, to ſay, that, " If Revelation
" enjoyns *more*, than the Law of Na-
" ture, it argues the Author of it to be
" of a tyrannical Nature, impoſing on
" his ſubjects *unneceſſary* things." To prove this, the Nature and Intent of the command itſelf muſt be taken into conſideration; and you can never be ſure a

Law

Law is unneceſſary, 'till you know *what* it is, and the *End*, for which it is given. Again,

" I deſire only to be allow'd, that " there's a Religion of Nature and Rea- " ſon, written in the Hearts of every " one of us from the firſt Creation; by " which all Mankind muſt judge of the " Truth of any Inſtituted Religion what- " ever: and, if it *varies* from the Reli- " gion of Nature and Reaſon, in any " one particular, nay in the minuteſt cir- " cumſtance; that is an argument, which " makes all things elſe, that can be ſaid " in its ſupport, totally ineffectual. If " ſo, muſt not *Natural Religion*, and *Ex- " ternal Revelation*, like two tallies, ex- " actly anſwer one another, without any " *other difference* between them, but as " to the *manner* of their being *deliver'd?* " And, how can it be otherwiſe? Can " Laws be imperfect, where a Legiſla- " tor is abſolutely perfect? Can Time " diſcover any thing to him, which he " did not foreſee from Eternity? And, " as his Wiſdom is always the ſame, ſo " is his Goodneſs, and conſequently, " from the conſideration of both theſe, " his Laws muſt always be the ſame. " Is it not, from the infinite wiſdom " and goodneſs of God, that you ſup-

" poſe

" poſe the *Goſpel* a moſt perfect Law,
" incapable of being repeal'd, or alter'd,
" or of having additions; and muſt not
" you own the *Law of Nature* as per-
" fect a Law, except you will ſay, that
" God did not arrive to the perfection
" of wiſdom and goodneſs, till about
" ſeventeen hundred years ago? *(p.* 60.)

I have already explain'd, at large, in what ſenſe alone the Religion of Nature can be ſaid to come from God; and that is, As it is the Reſult of thoſe faculties of Reaſon and Underſtanding, which we receive immediately from him. Which Account of the ſource and Origin of Natural Religion will ſhew us, how far we may ſafely grant our Author's *Poſtulatum*, that *there is a Religion of Nature and Reaſon written in the Hearts of every one of us from the firſt creation*; namely thus far, that Every Man is naturally endu'd with a capacity of diſtinguiſhing *Right* from *Wrong*. This being premis'd, we will allow him, that the Natural Reaſon of Mankind is the proper *Judge of the Truth of any Inſtituted Religion whatever*; but not, that *if Reveal'd Religion varies from Natural, in any one particular, nay in the minuteſt circumſtance, that is an argument, which makes every thing elſe, which can be ſaid*

in

in its ſupport totally ineffectual. Had he ſaid, *If it contradicts the Religion of Nature and Reaſon*, he wou'd have ſaid what is true. But *to vary* from a thing, is not always to *contradict* it. A Prince, forming Laws for his own Kingdom upon the Model of Thoſe of another, may *vary* from his *Pattern*, as the particular circumſtances of his own Subjects require, without *contradicting* it. And, ſhou'd the Circumſtances of Human Nature require an *Inſtituted* Religion, in ſome reſpects *different* from what Meer Nature cou'd preſcribe, ſuch a Religion wou'd not oppoſe, or in the leaſt contradict, the Principles of Nature and Reaſon; on the contrary it wou'd be perfectly agreeable to them, as being exactly accommodated to the Wants and Exigencies of Human Nature — But, *Can Laws be imperfect, where a Legiſlator is abſolutely perfect?* How, for God's ſake, does this prove, that God can give no *new Laws?* It only proves, that he cannot alter or mend thoſe, that he has given; that, whatever commands he iſſues out to his Creatures, can have no defects — But, *Can Time diſcover any thing to him, which he did not foreſee from Eternity?* No! but he may *defer* giving *new Laws*, till a *fullneſs of time*, a proper

per ſeaſon, of which he is ſurely the beſt Judge; ſo that God may have been equally *wiſe* and *good ſeventeen hundred Years ago*, when he left Men to collect his will from the Exerciſe of their Reaſon alone, as he is now, that he has given them an Expreſs Revelation of it.

The Laſt Argument, which I ſhall, at preſent, take notice of, occurs, *p.* 220. " If it be evident (ſays he) that we " can't diſcern, whether any inſtituted " Religion contains every thing worthy, " and nothing unworthy, of a divine " Original, except we can antecedently " by our Reaſon diſcern what is, and " what is not, worthy of having God " for its Author; it neceſſarily follows, " that *Natural and Reveal'd Religion* " *can't differ:* becauſe, whatever Rea- " ſon ſhews to be worthy of having " God for its Author, muſt *belong to* " *Natural Religion*, and whatever Rea- " ſon tells us is unworthy of having " God for its Author, can never be- " long to Reveal'd Religion. 'Tis up- " on this very plan I have endeavour'd " to ſhew you wherein *Genuine Chriſti-* " *anity* conſiſts.

We meet with the ſame notion at *p.* 64. where *B.* having aſk'd, " whether

" (allowing the Perfection of Natural " Religion) External Revelation might " not erect upon it a larger and nobler " Edifice, by extending it to ſuch things, " as the Light of Nature cou'd not " reach, without contradicting any " thing it teaches;" Our Author replys, that, " If our Natural Notions of " the divine Perfections demonſtrate, " that God will require nothing of his " Creatures, but what tends to their " Good, whatever is of this kind is a " *ſuperſtructure*, that *belongs to the Law* " *of Nature.*"

To which it is eaſy to reply, that Nothing, properly ſpeaking, belongs to *Natural Religion*, but what *Natural Reaſon* either *has*, or is *capable* of diſcovering. If there be any thing in *Reveal'd Religion* (which can only be known by conſulting the *Revelation itſelf)* which is apparently for the Good of mankind, but which the *wiſeſt* and beſt Men neither *did*, nor *cou'd* poſſibly know, without it; that, I ſay, is a *ſuperſtructure* of *Revelation* upon *the Law of Nature*; it is, *erecting a larger and nobler Edifice, by extending it to ſuch things, as the light of Nature cou'd not reach, without contradicting any thing it teaches.*

Thus

Thus I have examin'd our Author's *General Hypotheſis*, that *Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only in the manner of their being communicated.* As the plain Deſign of this Scheme is, under the pretence of *reconciling Revelation* with the *Law of Nature*, to ſet aſide the *former* as of *no Uſe* or advantage to mankind, I thought it proper to begin with a thorough diſcuſſion of it; in which I flatter my ſelf, that I have ſet the *Perfection* of *Natural Religion* (the grand foundation, upon which all our Author's reaſoning, is built) in its true Light, and to have demonſtrably prov'd, that *Reveal'd Religion* may, in ſome reſpects, *differ* from *Natural*, and be really *Diſtinct* from it, without *contradicting* any of its Principles.

APPENDIX.

OUR Author, in his *fourth Chapter*, has advanc'd an *Hypotheſis*, which, as it does not affect his *General Scheme*, cou'd not properly be taken notice of in the courſe of my *Remarks* upon it. But, as I think it ought not to paſs unexamin'd, I beg leave to detain the Reader a little longer, whilſt I preſent him with a ſhort view of the *Notion itſelf*, and the reaſons, why I apprehend the Author to be miſtaken in it.

The deſign of the *whole Chapter* is to ſhew, " That not only the *matter* " of God's Laws, but the *Penalties* an- " nex'd to them, are for the *Good* of " mankind, *even of thoſe, who ſuffer for* " *the breach of them.*"

The

The Subſtance of our Author's Reaſoning in proof of this Propoſition is as follows. " God does not make *Laws* " for *one end*, and require the obſerving " of them for *another* — As it was *for* " *the ſake of Man* he gave him Laws, " ſo he executes them *for the ſame Rea-* " *ſon*; ſince *upon his own account* he " can't be in the leaſt affected, whether " his Laws be, or be not, obſerv'd; " and, conſequently, in *puniſhing*, no " more than *rewarding*, does he act as " a *Party*, much leſs as an *injur'd* " *Party*, who wants *Satisfaction*, or Re- " paration of Honour — To ſuppoſe " God puniſhes to vindicate his Ho- " nour, as a *Legiſlator*, or, as the breach " of his Laws is an Injury done to " Him, takes off from that Eſteem " and Love Men muſt have for him, " did they believe he only puniſh'd, " *when*, and *no farther than*, their " Good requir'd — *Jealouſy* in point " of Honour or Power muſt as neceſ- " ſarily be excluded from an unlimit- " ed and abſolutely perfect Being, as " *Anger*, *Revenge*, and ſuch like Paſſions " — The Effects of *Divine Juſtice* " muſt not only be for the Good of " *others*, but *even of the Perſons puniſh'd.* " All Puniſhment for *Puniſhment's ſake*

" is

" is meerly Cruelty and Malice; and " therefore whatever *Puniſhment* he in- " flicts muſt be *a Mark* of his *Love*, " and deſign'd for our *Amendment* — " As God's infinite *Goodneſs* appears in " the *Sanctions*, as well as the *matter* " of his *Laws*; ſo his Infinite *Wiſdom* " knows how to *adjuſt* the *Puniſh-* " *ment* to the *offence*, ſo as *exactly* to " produce the *deſir'd Amendment*.

I have quoted thus much of our Author's ſentiments in this *Chapter*, not that I think the *whole* of his reaſoning *falſe*; but becauſe the *Hypotheſis*, laid down in the latter part, is plainly connected with, and deſign'd to follow as a conſequence from, the Reaſoning advanc'd in the former. Now our Author is certainly thus far right, that God does not *require the obſerving of his Laws* for any *Ends*, *different* from thoſe, for which he firſt gave them; as it is equally true, that the *Breach* of his Laws is no *real Injury* to him; and that when we deſcribe him as a *Jealous God*, we expreſs our ſelves as much in *metaphor*, as when we repreſent him as *angry*, or *revengeful*. But his miſtake lies in ſuppoſing, that " The " effects of divine Juſtice *(univerſally*; " for he makes no particular excep- " tions,)

" tions,) muſt not only be for the " Good of *others*, but *even of the Per-* " *ſons puniſh'd*;" and that " the infinite " wiſdom of God knows how to *ad-* " *juſt* the *Puniſhment* to the *offence*, ſo " as *exactly* to produce the *deſir'd Amend-* " *ment*.

Now, tho' it may be true, that Puniſhment is *often* for the Good *even* of *thoſe*, who ſuffer it; and that it *may* be ſo *adjuſted*, as to produce the deſir'd *Amendment*; yet, that it cannot be *univerſally true* (as this Gentleman has here laid it down) will appear, by applying the notion to the Puniſhment of ſinners *in this Life*, the *Temporal Judgments*, with which Providence ſometimes viſits the Guilty in this world.

Now, that They may be, and certainly are, in general, *intended*, not only to deter *others* from violating the Laws of God, but to reclaim and *amend* the *offending* Perſon; and therefore are as much deſign'd for the *Sinners* Good, as for that of *others*, there can be no doubt. But however rightly *adjuſted* the Nature and degree of the Puniſhment may be to produce the *deſir'd Amendment*, it is too true, that this effect does not *always* follow from it.

it. The Arm of Juſtice may fall upon an *abandon'd*, deſperate, wretch, inſenſible, not only to the milder checks of conſcience, but even to the *ſmart* of *Affliction itſelf*, and the *loud warnings* of *actual Puniſhment*. Now, if *one neceſſary End* of Puniſhment be the *Amendment* of the *offending Perſon*; and, if God be ſuppos'd (as certainly he muſt) to *know the Hearts* of all men; how will you reconcile the puniſhment of an *harden'd*, incorrigible, Sinner with the infinite wiſdom and Goodneſs of God? Muſt he not *foreknow*, that the Puniſhment will not have its proper effect? And if he never puniſhes, but with a deſign of *amending* the Sinner, how can he ever puniſh, where he is *ſure* the Sinner *cannot be amended?* If, therefore, ſuch *wretches* are ever the objects of divine Juſtice, in this world (as I think there is no doubt but they ſometimes are) they muſt be *exceptions* to the *general Rule*, and *one* great *end* of puniſhment be entirely *loſt* upon them. Thus this *Hypotheſis* is not *univerſally true*, when apply'd to the Puniſhments of *this Life*. With regard to thoſe of *another Life*, As the notion is plainly intended to *ſtrike at the Eternity of Hell-Torments*

ments (a Queſtion, which the Author himſelf reſerves the diſcuſſion of to a *properer time)* I ſhall not at preſent enter into the diſpute; and ſhall only obſerve, that he ſeems to have borrow'd his Hypotheſis from the *Platonick Notion* of the Puniſhments of *Hell*, thus beautiful deſcrib'd by *Virgil*, in the perſon of old *Anchiſes*.

Ergo exercentur pœnis, veterumque malorum
Supplicia expendunt; aliæ panduntur inanes
Suſpenſæ ad ventos; aliis ſub gurgite vaſto
Infectum eluitur ſcelus, aut exuritur igni.
Quiſque ſuos patimur manes: exinde per amplum
Mittimur Elyſium, & pauci læta arva tenemus.
Donec longa dies, perfecto temporis orbe,
Concretam exemit labem, purumque reliquit
Æthereum ſenſum, atque auraï ſimplicis ignem.

Æn. l. 6. lin. 739.

For this are various Penances enjoin'd;
And ſome are hung to bleach upon the wind;
Some plung'd in waters, others plung'd in fires;
Till all the dregs are drain'd, *and* all the ruſt expires.

All have their Manes, *and thoſe* Manes *bear* ;
The Few, ſo cleans'd, to the Abodes repair,
And breath, in ample fields, the ſoft Elyſian Air.
Then are they happy, when, by length of time,
The ſcurf is worn away of each *committed* Crime.
No ſpeck is left of their habitual Stains,
But the pure Æther *of the* Soul *remains.*

FINIS.

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